



National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC)

Key Issues 2013

In recent years, NMAC has issued a document emphasizing key issues that are essential to successful wildland fire operations in the coming season. The intent is to help managers recognize and prepare for challenges that, in NMAC's judgment, the fire community is likely to encounter.

This year, we would like to focus on a single issue: **The effects of tighter budgets, the proposed reductions to meet these budgetary challenges and the resulting consequences in fire and aviation capabilities.**

All indicators are that government will reduce in size, to match pace with budget reductions, during the next few years, perhaps at a rate that we've not experienced for some time. Agency fire and aviation programs will not be immune from the cutback measures. **The reality is that reduced budgets will impact our ability to deliver the same level of critical fire management resources as we may have been able to deliver in the past.**

Fire managers will need to find more strategic and nimble ways to manage resources and make better use of interagency partnerships. They will need to consider putting non-traditional resources to work. More than ever, managers must set practical priorities and stick with them. **It is likely that fire managers' requests for resources will not be filled to the same extent as before, as NMAC and the Geographic Areas make allocations based on a broader landscape perspective.** Fire managers must realize that the resource pool is finite and support levels that were considered routine just a few years ago may no longer be a given. Firefighters and managers must avoid expressions of frustration or disappointment to the public, news media, or elected officials about the quantity or timeliness of resource delivery.

Risk management will become a greater factor in decisions. Fire managers will need to continually weigh the values at risk against the safety of fire personnel and the public, the cost, and the diminished number of available resources.

We may well look back at 2013 as the first season of "the new normal," when overall resource capacity decreased even as fire seasons, in general, became more severe and managing fires grew more complex. Facing this new reality, though, compels the fire community to practice what it has historically done so well – the necessity to adapt, the opportunity to improve through innovation, the impetus to expand our interagency partnerships, as well as other steps that will help us to be as safe and effective as we can.

Remember, no matter what changes we face in fire, we emphasize that **safety of the firefighter and the public** always has been and always will be our main priority on every wildfire.

None of us would be in this business if we didn't relish a challenge. How we meet the challenges associated with the expected decrease in funding will set the standard for the fire and aviation community nationwide. The NMAC members believe all of us are capable of dealing successfully with that considerable task.